Almost polite

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/47863315.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter
Additional Tags:	Somewhere in Season 1, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Insecurity, Conflicted Will Graham
Language:	English
Series:	Part 12 of June of Doom
Stats:	Published: 2023-06-14 Words: 2,032 Chapters: 1/1

Almost polite

by BumblebeesAndDandelions

Summary

Will realizes what Hannibal is and decided to leave, but not without saying goodbye.

He could understand killers in a way no one else could, and isolated people craved connection. He was used to being alone himself, he knew what that sort of loneliness felt like. It was what had driven towards Alana Bloom, towards Hannibal.

Notes

June 13 - “Say Something”
| Broken Promise |

See the end of the work for more notes

There was a certain pride he'd harbored in his mind, his empathy, even when he hated it. It alienated him and made everyone around him wary, knowing he was different and strange, but it was still his. It was the thing through which he saw the world, the thing through which he saw everyone. It was both a shield separating him from the people around him and a blade pointed inwards. He was always bleeding somewhere, even if it was just in his head.

He was good at seeing people, good at bleeding out. He was good at his job, catching killers by seeing from their point of view. He knew that was why so many killers were drawn to him. He could understand them in a way no one else could, and isolated people craved connection. He was used to being alone himself, he knew what that sort of loneliness felt like. It was what had driven towards Alana Bloom, towards Hannibal.

Will wanted something more than all those killers that sought him. He wanted, desperately and with a hunger too sharp to ever keep it, normalcy. Any version of it. A little house with tended bushes and a pack of dogs was his normalcy, fought for and guarded. Killers, by their very nature, couldn't offer that. No picket fences in jail, no corpses at a cookout.

Hannibal, though. Hannibal had slipped through every defense he had, been allowed into that little house, walked among his pack. Hannibal was his friend, Hannibal offered normalcy and stability and refinement. Hannibal had been a surgeon, and had made no secret of his dislike of the rude.

He'd decided even before he climbed into his car. He kept his mind carefully blank on the long drive there, thinking of nothing of importance. There was nothing of importance left. Hannibal had narrowed his worldview, made himself the center of everything, and Will had let him, so invigorated by the prospect of friendship that he'd allowed every overstep Hannibal took.

It was dark by the time he pulled into Hannibal's driveway. The sunset had been unremarkable, no riot of colors or reaching rays to remember. That was alright. People often wanted the last of something they saw to be remarkable, something worthy of being the last one, but Will didn't mind. It had been the kind of sunset he'd seen a hundred times before, the kind that would be seen a thousand times more by a thousand different people. There was a sort of connection in that mundanity, a shared experience that linked him to people who wouldn't make him see, make him bleed.

The doorbell rang before Will caught up with himself, and then Hannibal was there in the open doorway, concerned and welcoming.

Will was detached, focusing too much on how to say the things he'd come to say that he missed everything else. They were in the kitchen. It was Hannibal's domain, and one of the most brightly lit rooms in his house. No shadows to hide in. Hannibal was making tea, saying something about late nights and shoring up one's constitution.

"What has brought you to my doorstep so late at night, Will? Have the murderers in your head begun to overwhelm you again?"

Concern, care. A friend, wanting to help him. A paddle to help him out of the dark waters.

“Are we-,” Will stopped, tried again, “do you consider me a friend?”

Hannibal paused his tea preparations, turning fully to Will.

“I consider you one of my dearest friends, Will. Is everything alright?”

There was a quarry, somewhere in Georgia. Water so murky you couldn’t see how deep it was and cliffs nearly fifty feet high. All the kids went in the summer, even the strange ones who saw too much. Standing on that cliff, staring down, Will had understood other people’s fear of heights. It had felt like he was weighed down, like he was so light a breeze could force him over the edge of the stone into the water. The other kids ran past him, jumping into the water without a care. They lived there, they knew the depth of the water, the hidden rocks to avoid. All Will knew was the height of the rocks and flatness of the water. He’d jumped, eventually, careful to land exactly where another boy had.

There was no one to follow this time, and the height seemed so much greater. The potential injury so much more. There was nothing else to do, though, on cliff edges, other than throw yourself off of them and hope.

“I’m quitting, I think. I need- I need to… convalesce, without Jack breathing down my neck. And- I wanted to see you, I guess, before I left.” The words felt wrong in his mouth, soft in the way of rotting things, leaving a residue in him.

Hannibal flicked through several emotions in the span of a couple seconds, landing on something akin to reassurance.

“Left? You have built a life for yourself here, would you abandon it that easily?”

Will shook his head, wanting to pace but not willing to let himself move. If he did, he might just run out the door, away from this conversation.

“Not easily, no. I just don’t know what else to do. I can’t- I don’t see any way forward anymore.”

“I promised once to be your paddle, Will, will you not trust me now to help guide you to a future?”

Will grimaced, tried to turn it into a smile, failed. He’d promised to be a paddle to guide him out of dark waters, and that was a promise they both knew he couldn’t keep. Hannibal lived in those waters, thrived in them, he had no real reason to let Will swim clear. Friendship, maybe. Will hoped friendship would be enough, because he had nothing else.

“I haven’t had many friendships in my life. You’re my friend though, maybe my only real one. I don’t- there are things I want to do, and things I know I should do, and I- I don’t want to lose you as a friend.” He couldn’t look at Hannibal anymore, so he trained his gaze downwards, watching Hannibal’s shoes move towards him until he was close enough to touch, should Will reach out. Close enough to hurt, too.

He had gotten good at not looking at Hannibal, so desperate to keep a friend. It was easy, Hannibal's mask was near perfect, and enough of his emotions were genuine, especially around Will, that the rest were easy to brush off. He was just- eccentric, foreign. Bordering on prissy, sometimes. His friend. An illusion he'd clung to for just a bit too long, pretending he'd made a real friend this time, not just another person seeking the type of connection only he could give.

It was one of the reasons he was here, instead of in Jack's office. The thing he was most hurt by was the potential that Hannibal had been faking their friendship, had never really cared, not the fact that he might be- that he likely was, Will could be honest with himself now, at the top of the cliff, a killer. He wouldn't be turning him in for the murders, he'd be turning him in because he hurt Will's feelings, and that made him feel like a child on the playground, tattling to the teacher.

Hannibal's hand touched his face, and he flinched, shocked out of his own thoughts. He cradled Will's face, gently turning him to look Hannibal in the eyes. He looked soft, softer than Will had ever seen him. He looked nearly loving, and Will found himself looking and seeing and bleeding.

Hannibal cared about him. Hannibal cared about him, and didn't know what to do with that care.

"I know who you are," Will breathed.

Hannibal froze, face hardening slightly, losing that beautiful, delicate softness. He didn't move though, didn't back away or strike, just kept looking at Will.

"I'm not- I still- you're my friend. I won't tell, I just- I can't stay, either."

Hannibal's hand, the one still cupping his jaw, twitched slightly, and for a moment Will thought he might just break his neck. Instead, Hannibal stepped back. It felt colder without Hannibal's warmth blanketing him.

He just stared, and Will couldn't take it, it felt like rejection.

"Say something, Hannibal. Please." He dared to look at Hannibal and nearly flinched at the coldness there, the lack of emotion.

"This is a goodbye, then. A final conversation before you disappear into the night. Almost polite."

His mask was back up, firmly in place, and oh, he was hurt by this. His mask wasn't enough, not anymore, not now that Will had seen through it. He was hurt that Will would leave. And Will felt so weak, now. He'd jumped from the cliff and found himself falling, and the only thing left to do was hit the bottom.

"Almost polite." Will repeated.

Hannibal considered him for a moment. He didn't look ready for violence, but then, he never did. Maybe he'd kill Will tonight, tie up a loose end, protect himself. Maybe he'd let him go, and forget he ever knew a twitchy FBI agent who saw too much, and cut himself on that seeing. Maybe, against all odds, he'd just- turn himself in. The choice was his, and Will wouldn't fight it. He let Hannibal see that, his weakness. He wouldn't fight a knife or a turned shoulder, he let Hannibal decide, and accept whatever he chose.

"Are you running because you are afraid, or because you do not know what else to do?" Hannibal asked.

Will laughed, broken and humorless, at the question. He knew what else he could do. His first instinct had been to hurt Hannibal, to tear him apart as punishment for his lies. He'd have done it with his hands, with his teeth. He could have called Jack, given the man his white whale on a silver platter. But both would make him lose Hannibal, he couldn't do that, not really.

He shrugged, hopeless. Unsure how to tell Hannibal that this was the only path he could see them both surviving. Alone, unmoored, but alive, at least on his end. Hannibal could recover, he was a force of nature. His paddle was a liar, and he couldn't see a way out without him.

Hannibal frowned at that, and seemed to come to a decision. He stepped forward again, pressing Will back into the counter. Will tensed, eyes on Hannibal. He hadn't cared about the sunset, but if he had to pick a last sight, Hannibal himself wouldn't be so bad. Dying with a friend and all. Dying to a friend.

Then Hannibal was reaching for his face, and Will waited for the snap of his own neck, but Hannibal's touch stayed light. He just cupped Will's face, thumb making tiny circles against his stubble. They stayed there for a moment, staring at each other. Then Hannibal moved closer, lowering his head to brush his lips against Will's.

Will's body responded before his mind could catch up, pressing against Hannibal, surging up slightly to kiss Hannibal back.

Oh. Oh. Another path. One he hadn't thought possible.

Hannibal closed around him, a hand at his waist and on his neck, pressing closer as he deepened the kiss, covering Will's body with his own. Nearly overwhelming in his closeness. Finally, he pulled back, just enough to breath, and they stayed there for a moment, foreheads pressed together as they panted the same air.

"Stay," Hannibal breathed. Pleaded.

The path Hannibal offered was different from the others. It was one that let them keep each other. Will was tired, exhausted, of cliff edges. He was tired of killers and being forced to look, of seeing too much and bleeding out. He was tired of being alone.

The water was deep and gentle where he landed, slipping in with barely a splash. No hidden rocks to smash himself against, not here, not now. The cliff was behind him, and he had a paddle to keep him afloat.

He kissed Hannibal again, and stayed.

End Notes

Hannibal was fully convinced Will was going to confess a crush first, and was angling for a kiss before Will told him the real reason he was there. He got one anyway :)

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